The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Second periodic report of Egypt (continued) (CRC/C/65/Add.9; HRI/CORE/1/Add.19; CRC/C/Q/EGY/2; written replies of the Government of Egypt to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Egypt resumed places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said she was somewhat sceptical about Egypt's claim in its second periodic report (CRC/C/65/Add.9) that all State authorities complied with the "best interests of the child" standard, since there was scarcely any country in the world that had so far succeeded in implementing that standard, even where it was enshrined in its legislation. Part of the problem consisted in the fact that there was no watertight definition of "best interests". It was for each State party to create its own definition on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, its relevance was not confined to children's codes or family codes. It should be applied across the board and taken into consideration, as a matter of priority, in the areas of health, welfare, education, culture and leisure and even in State budgeting and security policy.

3. The right of children and adolescents to respect for their opinions, together with the civil right of freedom of expression, called for the involvement of young people in public decision-making processes. Where pupils served on school councils, they should not be selected by the school authorities but elected by the students themselves. Moreover, decision makers had a responsibility not only to listen to children's views but also to take them into consideration, giving due weight to the age and maturity of the child.

4. She was concerned to note that a large number of special rapporteurs had visited Egypt pursuant to decisions by the Commission on Human Rights: the Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, on the independence of judges and lawyers, on religious intolerance, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, on torture and on violence against women. She asked whether the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) had undertaken an assessment of the general human rights situation and the status of the rights of the child in that context and, if not, whether it had any plans to do so.

5. Mr. RABAH noted that, according to paragraph 63 of the report, Egypt was making efforts to abolish female genital mutilation and the Minister of Health had prohibited such operations in State-run or other hospitals except for overriding medical reasons. It was an issue of concern in many Arab and other countries, especially when operations were conducted in remote areas which lacked the necessary medical facilities, entailing in many cases great physical and mental suffering for the victims. He asked whether it was the policy of the Minister of Health to prohibit the practice under all circumstances. In that connection, he noted with satisfaction that the authorities had organized family awareness campaigns.

6. Paragraph 74 (b) of the report specified the circumstances in which parental authority could be withdrawn and the child placed under the responsibility of a member of the family, a trustworthy person or a specialized institution. He wished to know who had the authority to take such decisions and what kind of specialized institutions were involved.

7. According to paragraph 84 of the report, monthly allowances were paid under the Social Security Act to certain categories of children such as orphans of unknown parentage and children of prisoners. In the latter case, he failed to understand why the allowance was payable only if the prisoner was serving a sentence of more than 10 years. He also inquired about the amount of the allowance in relation, for example, to the minimum wage.

8. Paragraph 104 of the report referred to measures to encourage prenuptial screening for hereditary or contagious diseases that might give rise to disabilities in children. He suggested that it would be in the best interests of the child, the family and the community to make such screening compulsory.

9. Mr. DOEK said he was puzzled to note that, while childhood was defined in the Convention as ending with the age of 18, the age of majority in Egypt was 21 years. He therefore assumed that persons in the 18 to 21 age group lacked full legal capacity and were still under parental control. He would welcome additional information concerning the status of that special category.

10. According to information received from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a meeting of the Youth and Child Coalition of Street Children had reported insults, beating and torture at the hands of the police and other authorities. What was the position of the Government on those reports? Were they reliable and was anything being done to prevent the recurrence of such behaviour?

11. The Egyptian Government was to be commended for promulgating a Ministerial Decree prohibiting corporal punishment in schools as early as 1971. But according to an article in a 1997 issue of the international journal Child Abuse and Neglect, 79 per cent of boys and 61 per cent of girls had reported being physically punished at school. He asked whether any action had been taken to address the problem such as an awareness programme for teachers. A more sensitive issue in all States parties was that of parental disciplining methods. According to the same journal, one quarter of children reported physical punishment of varying severity in the home. What was the Government doing to address that issue? He had been surprised to read, in paragraph 96 of the report, that the information on child abuse and neglect given in the initial report (CRC/C/3/Add.6, paras. 174-188) remained unchanged; the initial report merely described the existing legislation. He wondered whether the Government was concerned about its compliance with article 19 of the Convention and, if so, what action it was taking to implement its provisions. No information had been given concerning, for example, services, reporting or treatment facilities.

12. He acknowledged that the support system for families was well developed. According to the report, the Ministry of Social Affairs managed and supervised nurseries, and ran a

"host family" project on behalf of working mothers. The tables showed, however, that the capacity of existing nurseries was underused. Was that attributable to strict selection criteria, prohibitive fees or other factors?

13. Ms. KARP said that the purpose of her question at the previous meeting regarding the Committee on Legislation had been to establish whether it intended to improve the content of the Children's Code. She wished to know whether the Code was comprehensive or whether some matters affecting children were dealt with in other legislation.

14. Was corporal punishment prohibited in all schools, including private and religious establishments, or only in State-run schools? She was interested in hearing whether teachers were made aware of their obligations in that regard and whether the Ministry of Education had established a complaints procedure for children who were victims of teacher violence, including provision for disciplinary measures and the suspension of teachers where appropriate. If complaint proceedings were lengthy, the classroom relationship between the complainant and the teacher concerned could be particularly awkward. Had the Egyptian authorities found a way of dealing with such situations? She was pleased to note that Alexandria University had published reports on corporal punishment, which could be helpful in devising appropriate policies, such as the involvement of students themselves in eliminating violence, including inter-student violence, in schools.

15. She stressed the importance of awareness programmes for parents concerning the adverse impact of corporal punishment on the dignity of the child and suggesting alternative measures. Noting the existence of parental counselling projects in Egypt, she asked whether they covered the whole country or were confined to urban areas.

16. She agreed with Mr. Rabah that the practice of female genital mutilation was more dangerous when conducted in remote areas without medical facilities. She suggested that the authorities, as part of their awareness campaign, might consider promoting alternative ceremonies analogous to those introduced in some other African countries. Such ceremonies were designed to preserve cultural traditions while eliminating the mutilation involved in the existing practice.

17. She understood that under the Children's Code the mother normally had custody of boys until the age of 10 and girls until the age of 12 but that judges could prolong such custody under certain circumstances. She would appreciate additional information about the situation in practice. Were children removed from the mother unless she had proved that she was more capable than the father? Clearly, the best interests of the child should be the decisive factor. Was the fact that a change in custody might in itself be harmful taken into consideration?

18. With regard to the right to information, she asked to what extent television was used not only to promote new ideas and to change public attitudes but also, for example, as a medium for educating adolescents in reproductive health, given the difficulty of incorporating such courses into the school curriculum.

19. Noting that the concluding observations on Egypt's initial report had failed to mention the issue of domestic violence, she said that the Committee's approach had evolved in the

meantime as it became aware of the possibly devastating impact of the abuse of children or of violence between parents. Did the authorities encourage victims to file complaints? Under the new divorce legislation it was, in principle, easier for women to escape domestic violence but she wondered whether the attitude of the police, judges and welfare services had also evolved. To what extent did women really have redress in that area?

20. Mr. FULCI said that Egypt could play a leading role in the Arab world by withdrawing its reservations to articles 20 and 21 of the Convention. He gathered that the possibility of a child being compelled to change his or her name in the event of adoption was a major concern, but comprehensive safeguards were provided in article 20, paragraph 3, which dealt with kefalah under Islamic law.

21. To judge from the delegation, women were very prominent in Egyptian society; however, there still appeared to be discrimination against girl children. It would be interesting to know why, under the legislation on personal status, a girl received only half the amount of an inheritance as a boy, and whether Egypt had considered changing that provision.

22. Allegedly, there was also discrimination against vulnerable groups of children, such as children with disabilities, refugee children, children of minority groups, street children and, in particular, children in rural areas, where there were even reports of abusive use of child labour by agricultural cooperatives. The Committee would appreciate information on any measures the Egyptian Government was envisaging in order to combat or prevent such discrimination.

23. Ms. MOKHUANE asked whether the child's right to privacy was respected by the family and social institutions. With regard to the right of access to appropriate information, the Committee had been informed that there was a lack of control mechanisms relating to the selection of television programmes for children, based on age, and would appreciate further information in that regard.

24. Regarding respect for the views of the child in matters relating to child custody, the report mentioned that there were cases of children being allowed to stay with the mother. It would be useful to have some statistics and, as Egyptian society was very patriarchal, to know whether there were cases when a boy child was allowed to remain with the mother.

25. The report mentioned that many programmes were being organized for mothers and it would be useful to know whether any impact assessment studies had been conducted. The report also referred to counselling for parents; additional information would be welcome on the major problems described by parents and on how those problems affected the well-being of children.

26. Ms. RILANTONO said that, despite the evident progress made by women, the Committee had the impression than Egypt was still a male-dominated society; there appeared to be discrimination, or at least differences, concerning responsibilities. For example, according to the Children's Code, every child had to have a health record, but it appeared that only a father could request it. It also seemed that discrimination against the girl child, or against women, was not merely traditional, but was perpetuated, according to some documents, by the media and school texts. She asked what measures were being taken to protect women from threats of sexual abuse by police and State agents.

27. With regard to freedom of association, it appeared that the law on non-governmental organizations stipulated that associations could be founded only by full citizens; in other words, persons of 21 years of age or over. The Committee had also been informed that student associations had no say in educational matters and would welcome further information on that point.

28. Lastly, with regard to freedom of expression, she would like to know whether a hotline existed for children to express their opinions and make complaints.

29. Ms. KHATTAB (Egypt), referring to the best interests of the child, said that the report might seem very optimistic with regard to the legislation that had been put in place; however, efforts to develop a culture of the rights of the child had begun only in the early 1990s and it was not possible to change a society in 10 years. Egypt was proceeding by first incorporating the rights of the child into its legislation and then systematically applying the laws. The development of the child was a component of the national plan for social and economic development, which was a comprehensive plan covering education, health and culture. Evidently, all the goals had not been achieved yet, but the country was proceeding in the right direction.

30. Egypt recognized that there continued to be some abuse of street children, girls and women by the police, but training courses for the police and for judiciary authorities had been organized and the situation was improving; there were also courses for teachers, owing to reports of violence against children in school. The Ministry of Education had issued a decree prohibiting physical abuse of children in school and many teachers had already been suspended; now children had the right to complain to a social worker or parents could bring complaints to the parent association. In general, the Government was making a major effort to reform every aspect of education, that included upgrading schoolteachers, revising curricula and standards and reviewing the treatment of the child.

31. Egypt was very aware of the right of children to influence decisions and be listened to and was taking measures to implement such rights.

32. She would appreciate further information concerning the reports produced by the various special rapporteurs who had visited Egypt. She recommended that such reports should be forwarded to the country concerned, to enable it to respond to them directly in its reports to the Committee.

33. The Egyptian culture was very conservative and did not allow prostitution or trafficking in children and, although children were sometimes disciplined by beating in the home, there had been some improvement due to awareness-raising campaigns. Ninety per cent of the population watched television and it was therefore a most effective medium for educating parents or any group of society, including the illiterate.

34. Concerning the reference in the report to medical conditions that might justify female genital mutilation, she said she wished to make it clear that the Government's intention was to eradicate it completely. Moreover, the Government was aware of the dangers raised if the

operation was performed clandestinely. In Egypt, female circumcision was not surrounded by a ceremony, as in some African countries, so there was no question of substituting one ceremony for another.

35. The pension of 20 Egyptian pounds mentioned in paragraph 90 of the report was now 50 Egyptian pounds; that was still very small, but it was dependent on available resources. It was hoped shortly to make compulsory the prenuptial screening for hereditary or contagious diseases cited in paragraph 104. The Children's Code had been published only in Arabic so far, but it was hoped to translate it for the Committee soon. The purpose of the survey mentioned was to evaluate the perception of the media coverage of the programmes for children; a copy would be sent to the Committee.

36. Currently, there was a constitutional obstacle to withdrawing the reservation to article 10 of the Convention; however, Egypt was endeavouring to address family reunification issues as best it could within its legal system.

37. Under Shariah, a girl received only half the amount of the inheritance that a boy received, because a man took care of the needs of his wife and a father took care of the needs of a girl child.

38. On the question of child abuse, the use of child labour in agricultural tasks was traditional and did not imply that children were being physically abused; however, Egypt was endeavouring to eradicate it, based on two approaches: elimination of poverty, and education and awareness-raising for all those involved.

39. There were control mechanisms for some television programmes; however, Egyptian society was very conservative, and people generally did not watch programmes containing violence or obscenity.

40. A mother also had the right to apply for and obtain a health record.

The meeting was suspended at 4.15 p.m. and resumed at 4.25 p.m.

41. Ms. BADRAN (Egypt) said that non-governmental organizations were doing much to raise awareness about female circumcision, and had organized an advocacy campaign to advance legislation. They were also conducting studies on the factors that led to circumcision and it appeared that, in Egypt, the real issue was that families wanted their daughters to remain chaste and many men requested that their wives should be circumcised. However, an association called the Friends of the Rights of the Girl Child had recently been established, composed of men who were trying to convince others that it was in a man's best interest that his wife should not be circumcised, because circumcision caused considerable suffering during sexual relations.

42. NGOs were working to eradicate violence in the family and had prepared five videos to educate men not to beat their wives and children. They were also working with schools on training children to practise their rights and training teachers to accept the participation of

children. Extra-curricular activities, such as theatrical presentations on the rights of the child, had been organized. In that regard, the Ministry of Education was reviewing primary school textbooks and changes would be made to incorporate aspects of the rights of the child.

43. The Convention on the Rights of the Child stated that children should be able to express their views and be taken into consideration; that implied changing the reigning culture, but democracy was increasing at all levels. Student unions were elected and schoolchildren were receiving training on different aspects of elections, taking into account their age and maturity.

44. NGOs were also advocating that there should be a policewoman in each police station, to encourage women to bring complaints concerning violence in the home to the police.

45. The total capacity of nurseries for children under the age of four was not fully utilized because there was now a series of possibilities, including private day-care services, and supply exceeded demand.

46. There had been a great improvement in the image of women and girls in the media and currently every television channel but one was headed by a woman.

47. Regarding the impact of education on children's rights, a study was being conducted on the change in attitudes and values of both parents and schools over the last 10 years. It would be completed within the next year and the findings would be included in Egypt's next report to the Committee.

48. Mr. GABR (Egypt) said that changing attitudes and mentalities was a very long process requiring years of effort. In that regard, the Government's desire to ensure respect for the law was as important as the law itself. The new Children's Code reflected the State party's wish to ensure respect for the Convention. It addressed certain problems which were linked to practices dating back thousands of years, such as female circumcision, and set out provisions to change attitudes in society, including the prohibition of corporal punishment both in schools and in the home.

49. The Ministry of Health had issued two decrees against female circumcision, one in 1994 and another in 1996. While the first prohibited doctors from performing such operations unless they were carried out in certain circumstances, the second banned female circumcision altogether. In practice, if female circumcision was still performed, it was due to problems in implementing the law. While female circumcision in Egypt was generally a superficial operation and had nothing to do with the more serious female genital mutilation carried out in many other African countries, it was extremely harmful to the girl child. As a paediatrician, he had seen that doctors and nurses had for the past 50 years advocated for an end to the practice, and he was confident that the prohibition of female circumcision would eventually be successful.

50. There were many Government and private health centres where prospective spouses could, free of charge or for a nominal fee, undergo premarital medical examinations and obtain a certificate. Premarital examinations were not obligatory, and it was questionable whether it

would be advisable to make them so. Nonetheless, the Government was promoting premarital counselling and examinations. Reproductive health programmes broadcast in the mass media had been very successful. Thanks in large part to such programmes, contraceptive use had risen from 27 per cent to 51 per cent between the early 1980s and the 1990s.

51. Mr. EL-GUINDI (Egypt) said that the definition of the best interests of the child was a complicated question which involved both legislative acts and judicial interpretation. It also would inevitably have to take into account the environment, conditions and customs in a given society; the best interests of the child could not refer to a uniform standard throughout the world.

52. Children and youths at school and in university had the right to form students' unions, which could deliberate and communicate their positions to the institutions' managing councils. The law governing associations provided a specific exemption for children, which made it possible for them to form associations in schools with fewer constraints than those which applied to other organizations.

53. Cases of children placed in foster homes or other families were followed up by officials designated by the State, who were required to submit written reports. If the care were found to be insufficient or inappropriate, the child would be withdrawn from the family and the corresponding allowances would no longer be disbursed. The figure of 20 Egyptian pounds mentioned in connection with social security payments represented the minimum, and had been set when the law had first been adopted. That minimum had since been raised. The State did not have sufficient resources to cover all the needs of children who lacked adequate care. A number of NGOs provided such assistance as well.

54. Social security benefits were provided to children of prisoners serving terms of at least 10 years. Children of prisoners serving short sentences would in any case not receive support before their fathers' release because of the time required for the administrative processing of their benefits. The limit of 10 years was somewhat arbitrary, and could conceivably be reduced by half.

55. Under a draft law, no marriage contract could be concluded unless both prospective spouses could produce certificates attesting to the fact that they did not have contagious or congenital diseases which could have a detrimental influence on the life, health or capabilities of their children. That bill had been submitted to the People's Assembly, which had decided that it could not currently be applied to certain rural areas. In the opinion of that body, cultural considerations would preclude premarital medical examinations of girls in the countryside. That part of the bill had therefore temporarily been omitted. There was also the need to set up the appropriate technical facilities, such as medical laboratories or clinics in isolated and rural areas, before any mandatory testing could be enforced.

56. The age of majority was 21, and the maximum age of a child was 18. People between the ages of 18 and 21 were entitled to all the rights of adults, with the exception of eligibility for civil procedures and the right to sell or mortgage property. They were, however, fully entitled to engage in trade and commerce.

57. Torture, and all the more so torture of children, was not tolerated in Egypt. Dozens of police officers, sometimes at the highest level of command, had been prosecuted for brutality and torture. In any cases involving allegations of torture of a child, the police officer in question would immediately be brought to trial. Magistrates took very seriously their duty to bring perpetrators of torture to justice, and there had been a number of cases which had resulted in severe sentences. Corporal punishment in schools was illegal, and any teacher who engaged in brutality against students would be subject to disciplinary action.

58. Efforts were being made in the media to promote the child as a participant in the family and to combat child abuse, in particular by promoting family values and providing forums in which children could meet the Minister of Education and other adults and discuss their concerns. When complaints of child abuse were received, the child had the right to meet a psychologist and a social worker, as well as a female police officer. A hotline had been set up to facilitate the reporting of child abuse, and measures were taken without delay when reports were received.

59. It was considered that boys up to the age of 10 required the presence of a female member of the family, so custody was awarded to the mother, or if the mother remarried, to the boy's grandmother. Boys older than 10 were felt to require the presence of a male figure, and were placed in the custody of their fathers. For girls, the age when custody was transferred to the father was generally 12, but the law allowed courts, in the best interests of the child, to permit girls to live with their mothers later than that, and sometimes until they married.

60. The reservation filed by Egypt related exclusively to the use of the word "adoption". Adoption was not permitted under Islamic law, for reasons relating inter alia to inheritance practices. However, the Government of Egypt had no objection to the content of articles 21 and 22 of the Convention.

61. Mr. DOEK said that, according to reports, an investigation had been conducted into the selling of children's organs. In a three-month period, some 25 children had allegedly died in suspicious circumstances in a single orphanage. Had the investigation been concluded, and if so, what had been its outcome? According to a report by Human Rights Watch, some 1.2 million children under the legal age of 12 were engaged in seasonal jobs controlling pests in cotton fields. Conditions of work there were very poor, with some children working seven-day weeks and over 10 hours a day for remuneration of less than a dollar a day. While welcoming the fact that the Government had initiated cooperation with ILO's International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), he inquired as to whether it had taken any specific measures to ensure the sustainability of such programmes. Lastly, the report enumerated the objectives of the national campaign against child labour. How many of those objectives, which had been adopted in 1995, had been achieved?

62. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said that the Committee tried, when considering children's rights in a country, to take into consideration the overall situation of human rights there, in particular by referring to the reports of the United Nations treaty bodies, special rapporteurs and NGOs. Was the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood aware of the existence of such reports? Had its members assessed them and their possible impact on the

rights of the child? The Commission on Human Rights assigned special rapporteurs and country rapporteurs to follow various human rights questions. The Commission sometimes requested invitations from Governments to allow its rapporteurs to draw up reports with a better knowledge of the country's situation. However, some reports were written without the authors having visited the country in question.

63. Mr. RABAH asked about problems related to education. According to NGOs, drop-outs often became juvenile offenders, and the qualification levels of teaching staff were sometimes low. What trends had been observed in education? Was there any intention to integrate disabled children into regular schools rather than isolate them in special institutions? The report referred to international cooperation highlighting the link between children, the environment and development activities. He asked what concrete steps had been taken in that regard.

64. He would appreciate information on the situation in alternative institutions housing juvenile offenders. Were children between the ages of 16 and 18 subject to the same sentences as adults, or did they receive reduced sentences? If a child was serving a sentence on his or her eighteenth birthday, would that child be transferred to an adult prison? If so, that would mean that he or she would then mix with adult criminals, which could only have a harmful effect. Appeals concerning short sentences for teenagers could easily be a futile exercise, as the time required for the appeal could exceed the sentence itself. It would be interesting to have more detailed information on cooperation between the police and NGOs. Lastly, was the Government satisfied with the way the social welfare institutions for minors listed in the report dealt with juveniles?

65. Mr. FULCI commended the Government for its plans to discontinue and possibly prohibit the use of baby formula as breast milk substitutes because of the health hazards they posed. Noting that in the case of mothers infected with HIV/AIDS transmission was possible through breastfeeding, he asked approximately how many mothers were affected by the disease and whether any special measures were under consideration to allow them to feed their children with alternative means.

66. Did the Government intend to ratify the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)?

67. Ms. SARDENBERG said the Committee attached a great deal of importance to the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention because they conveyed the wrong message; that was all the more serious in the case of Egypt because of the important role it played in fostering the rights of the child and in changing attitudes in its region and culture. The Committee had been informed that three United Nations special rapporteurs had requested the right to visit Egypt to conduct their work. It was of the utmost importance to ensure that the dialogue on human rights would be a constant and constructive one, in which the Government took part and demonstrated its understanding of the indivisibility of rights.

68. When visiting Egypt she had been impressed by the discussion on discrimination. Notwithstanding the efforts already made, she noted that 95 per cent of boys and 88 per cent of

girls were enrolled in school, and that the disparity was far greater in certain regions. Clearly, it was necessary to continue those efforts. Could the delegation provide further information on the activities of the Task Force on Girls' Education? She had heard of an initiative by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) whereby women judges from other Arab countries would visit Egypt to discuss gender discrimination and to explain that Islamic law did not condone such behaviour. There had been a proposal by NGOs to establish a district attorney for children as a first step toward setting up an ombudsman's office. During a survey of children's participation, it had emerged that children were requesting more sexual education. She would appreciate further information on those matters.

69. Although she welcomed the first ever national strategy concerning disabled children, she wondered whether it was advisable for it to have such long-term objectives. The children affected would be adults well before the 20-year strategy was fully implemented. She asked what problems had been encountered in implementing the strategy. In particular, was it true that services were only provided for children with very moderate forms of mental disability?

70. She would be interested to learn what action was being taken in response to a study concerning child rights in Egypt, carried out for the United Nations by Ms. Mervat Talawi.

71. Ms. MOKHUANE said she understood that access to primary health-care centres was not a problem, but could the delegation indicate whether the quality of care was satisfactory? In the field of education, despite considerable progress in teaching standards, there still seemed to be a shortage of school buildings, particularly at the primary level. What was the Government doing to improve that situation? She shared Ms. Sardenberg's concern that disability programmes concentrated only on mildly retarded children, and asked what the Government planned to do for those with more serious difficulties. Lastly, was there adequate protection for Palestinian, Sudanese and Somali refugees to ensure that they had access to education and health care?

72. Ms. KARP said she welcomed the progress made in improving educational provision, particularly the setting up of one-room schools, but some remote areas, such as Sinai, still had no provision at all. Did the Government have a plan of action to extend provision to those areas?

73. Despite Egypt's attendance at the Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, a national plan of action to implement its recommendations had yet to be developed. She failed to understand the reason for that delay. While she welcomed the fact that child prostitution was forbidden by law, she expressed concern that the children involved should themselves be treated as criminals.

74. Concerning juvenile justice, she understood that children under the age of 15 were not regarded as punishable pursuant to the Children's Code, yet they were liable to be sent to closed institutions, which constituted a deprivation of liberty. She would be grateful if the delegation could clarify that apparent contradiction. It was also a matter of concern that there appeared to be no limit to the length of time a child under the age of 15 could be kept in pre-trial detention at the discretion of the courts.

75. It was difficult to understand why children under the age of 15 were dealt with in the criminal courts, if they were not liable to punishment. Given that the main aim was to provide

them with rehabilitation, would it not be more suitable to consider such cases under the social welfare system? Was there a continuous monitoring mechanism to ensure that children were kept separate from adults in prisons? It would be useful to have details of any problems that existed in enforcing the child's right to assistance in legal proceedings. Lastly, was it compulsory to notify the parents when a child was arrested?

76. Mr. DOEK said he was concerned about the apparent criminalization of social problems. According to table 25 in the report, juveniles were placed in institutions for, among other things, begging, prostitution and homelessness. With regard to repeat offenders, he failed to see the usefulness in holding parents criminally liable. The statistics on welfare institutions provided in table 24 would be more instructive if the delegation could confirm the actual number of inmates as opposed to the capacities of the institutions.

77. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked whether there were sufficient financial, technical and human resources available for dealing with economic and social problems. She would be interested to learn whether the delegation was satisfied with the budgetary allocation from the Government and with the technical assistance it received. It would also be useful to have details of the sources of government revenue. For instance, did municipalities have the right to levy taxes as well as central Government?

78. Mr. EL-GUINDI (Egypt), replying to questions concerning child labour, said that the law forbade parents to allow seasonal work to interfere with a child's education. Nevertheless, it was not illegal for children in agricultural communities to work during periods of intense activity for a week or two, just as they did in countries like France and Switzerland.

79. Many juvenile justice institutions had recently been refurbished, including the addition of new sports and recreational facilities. The institutions were staffed entirely by trained personnel, so that children had no contact with law enforcement officers after their arrest. Prisoners were transferred to adult prisons only when they reached the age of 21 and if, on reaching that age, they had less than six months of a sentence still to run, the transfer did not take place at all.

80. He confirmed that both adults and children possessed the right to appeal. A social worker was required to be present whenever a child appeared in court, in order to ensure that he or she received special treatment. When a child was arrested, police were required by law to inform the parents, and to offer the child the opportunity to phone them. Children were released into the care of their parents as a general rule or detained in institutions if the family environment had been the source of delinquency in the first place, for instance in cases where parents forced their children into prostitution.

81. There was no law preventing women from becoming judges, even though none had been appointed so far. There were, however, a number of women working for the Office of the Public Prosecutor, and the post of Chief Administrative Prosecutor was currently occupied by a woman.

82. Begging was not considered an offence for children in the same way that it was for adults. Children detained for begging were released back into the care of their parents, although if they offended a second time, criminal action could be taken.

83. Ms. KHATTAB (Egypt), replying to questions concerning the disability strategy, said that the Government had been advised that 20 years was the minimum length of time required to implement a strategy. Children with hearing difficulties were provided with hearing aids free of charge, and NGOs were working closely with the Government to help those with learning difficulties. With regard to one-room schools, there were plans to extend the scheme to even the most remote areas. The Task Force on Girls' Education had been set up as a result of a workshop on girls' education, which had taken place in Egypt in October 2000 under the auspices of the United Nations, and was an indication of the Government's determination to improve the status of women in society.

84. Besides taxation, public revenue came from the Suez Canal, petroleum sales and expatriate contributions. Resources for social spending were insufficient, and more technical assistance, for instance from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, would certainly be appreciated.

85. The requests from the Special Rapporteurs on torture, freedom of expression and the independence of the judiciary to visit her country had been passed on to the competent Egyptian authorities and the necessary arrangements were being made. Furthermore, an invitation had been extended to Ms. Bonoan-Dandan, Chairperson of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to visit Egypt.

86. Mr. GABR (Egypt) said that Egypt followed the World Health Organization's guidelines on breastfeeding and that the actual breastfeeding rates were 92 per cent in rural and 87 per cent in urban areas. Just 279 cases of AIDS had been registered in Egypt in the previous 10 years, and only 12 of those individuals had been below the age of 14. Thirty per cent of primary health-care centres had been completely refurbished and within the next two years all of those centres would be turned into comprehensive family health units.

87. The CHAIRPERSON invited Mr. Rabah to offer some preliminary conclusions.

88. Mr. RABAH said that Egypt's reservations to the Convention were no longer necessary, except with regard to the terms of adoption. He expressed satisfaction with the extent of the dissemination of the Convention. Matters for concern that still needed to be addressed included child labour, particularly when it took place under dangerous conditions, female genital mutilation and early marriage. An independent Ombudsman to receive children's complaints should be established, and the issue of citizenship for the children of women married to foreign nationals should be resolved. Innovative solutions to tackle the root causes of begging would be more effective than punishing children when it occurred, marriage certificates needed to be compulsory and disabled children in rural areas still lacked adequate care. Juveniles detained in prison institutions must have access to permanent educational provision.

89. Ms. KHATTAB (Egypt) said that many of the issues raised during the discussion would continue to be addressed within the context of the second decade for the protection and development of the Egyptian child. There had been considerable recent progress with regard to

some of the points made by Mr. Rabah in his preliminary concluding observations, and she invited the Committee to review some of those issues in the light of the written replies her delegation would submit shortly.

90. Mr. EL-GUINDI (Egypt) said that the Ministry of Justice had already established a rights of the child protection body to act as an Ombudsman and to train social workers in related issues.

91. The CHAIRPERSON expressed appreciation for Egypt's acceptance of the amendment to article 43 of the Convention. She hoped that the Government would bear in mind its responsibility under article 44 to publicize its report and the concluding observations of the Committee as widely as possible.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.